THE WIND AND THE RAIN

SPRING, 1943

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1/6 Quarterly, 1/8 post free. Annual Subscription, 6/6.
Advertisement rates given on written application.
Editorial and publishing offices, 15 NEWTON COURT, LONDON, W. 8.
Young writers welcomed, though all MSS. must be accompanied by a stamped addressed envelope.

J.B. Ltd. 87843

Owing to greatly increased expenses the editors regret that they have to raise the price of 'The Wind & The Rain' from 1/- to 1/6, starting with this number. This means that the annual subscription has also to be changed from 4/6 to 6/6. Readers who have already placed subscriptions in our hands will of course not be affected by these alterations until their subscriptions run out.

THE WIND AND THE RAIN

Edited by:

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Vol. 11 No. 2

EDITORIAL

THE student of wartime psychology should read Max Beerbohm's delightful fantasy, *The Dreadful Dragon of Hay Hill*. Besides being the work of a great writer at his best, it is an illuminating comment on present-day politics. The story is of a village (later to become the city of London), 'thirty-nine thousand years before the birth of Christ.' In the first few pages this prehistoric community is described in some detail. We are told how advanced, progressive and enlightened the villagers considered themselves, but how lacking they were in the virtues of kindness and mutual trust. Then one fateful day a dragon came to *Hay Hill* and all that was changed, in the 'time of greater stress' when the horrid shape of the monster cast a gloomy shadow over the *Homeland*, the moral tone of the little community improved beyond all measure. And after a short time 'quarrels had become rare. Ill-natured gossip was frowned on. Suspicions throve not. The Homelanders liked one another. They had been drawn charmingly together in brotherhood and sisterhood.' Then the crisis. The dragon was slain, and slowly the community reverted to its old way of life. The good resolutions were forgotten and the goodwill between man and man gradually disappeared. In the end the community were only saved by the self-sacrifice of two heroic Homelanders, who at the expense of very considerable discomfort turned themselves into an artificial dragon, in order to preserve that state of tension so necessary for the well-being of their village.

The analogy of course is obvious. The present conflict has produced a spirit of idealistic heroism never before experienced with such intensity in this country, The willingness to abandon the selfish

attitude of peace is by no means confined to the armed forces or to those directly concerned with the war. It seems in some curious way to have permeated the life of the whole country. In every sphere of action the relations between one individual and another have undergone a very considerable change. This change can be seen most strikingly in the field of politics and social reform. But for the Nazi dragon across the channel the Beveridge Report and all it stands for would have been unthinkable, or at least doomed to inevitable failure. The plans for reconstruction emanating from the headquarters of the various political parties indicate quite clearly that a new spirit is abroad. Vested interests and personal animosities are for the moment forgotten. Altruism reigns supreme.

Though it is easy to draw the analogy between ourselves and the Homelanders in this favourable sense, we must not forget that Max Beerbohm's story, like all the best stories, has a moral attached. The war like the dragon cannot last for ever, and when the danger is over there is bound to be a reaction ; a tendency in the years of victory to consider wartime planning as an outbreak of hysterical idealism brought on perhaps by the mental strain of crisis ; a nostalgic longing for the easy selfish path of *laissez faire*. This attitude which can be studied in detail in the disastrous history of the nineteen-twenties is the most formidable threat to reconstruction. Inevitably there will be those—a majority perhaps—who will revive the old battle cries of reaction, condemning all reform as Utopian nonsense.

We can only meet this threat by realising that there is nothing very noble or idealistic about the Beveridge report, or for that matter about any of the more serious schemes for reform, at least judged by the absolute standard of Christian morality. They are not in any sense luxurious improvements to a structure already satisfactory. They are for the most part the minimum demanded by the laws of justice ; the basic ration of any society calling itself civilised. What Sir William Beveridge has suggested in his report is that we should recognise that a man has a certain status in society in virtue of his citizenship ; a status entitling him to certain privileges regardless of any ability to sell himself in the labour market. If we are going to think well of ourselves because we recognise this fundamental principle of Christian ethics, our civilisation must be in an advanced condition of decay. By any logical process the next step would be to congratulate ourselves because we have avoided the methods and technique of the Gestapo. We must regard the provisions against want by means of social insurance as but the first step towards the recognition of the full rights—and there are many—implied in the status of citizen in a Christian community. Perhaps the next move will be in the direction of education, a central feature in any sane policy of reconstruction.

The change from medieval to modern society was, according to Maine's famous dictum a change from status to contract. At the present time that process is being slowly reversed. The inhuman laws of contract from which we suffered so grievously in the nineteenth

century have been considerably mitigated in the last fifty years and the proposals of Sir William Beveridge are designed to complete this process. But we must not think that we have achieved anything very splendid. After years of criminal neglect we have at last begun to consider seriously our most elementary duties. Social reform in this country is no luxury it is still a necessary and urgent matter of justice. R.B.

TWO SONNETS

(*For Priscilla*)

I

Yes, I am solid gold, you solemn gold,
The grave image you hold within your hands,
The mechanism that to your demands
Owes all its smoothness, all its warmth . . . its world.
When blows the wind and wintry grows the cold
Fly down the distant chimneys sparks of fire,
As down my own weird instrument desire
Shoots gust of red-tongued passion, as you hold
This mountain universe that love has made
From the mere rocks upon which we were splayed,
This valley of content that only you
Could quarry from a century's wintertime.
O darling, for this gift, what will we do
But praise, like solid gold, our worths in rhyme.

II

Gold that grows green with age grows bright with love—
Polished to make new glitter what was old
Shines starry-eyed and fine a hundredfold.
Such will you be to me : such is our love.
We will say no to tarnish, as the rock
Lifts its proud head against mountainous winds
Or still proves strong against the seas that suck ;
O we will stronger be than rock, sea, winds,
Matching ourselves against the waves of Time
And all the hunger of a warring world :
Birth beauty breaks, breaks beauty in the world
And in our daughter we will master Time.
A golden rock upon a golden shore,
The image stands, and we can say no more.

NICHOLAS MOORE.

THE STUDY OF CATHOLIC LITERATURE

Catholicism and English Literature, by Edward Hutton. (Muller, 8/6).

Reviewed by T. A. BIRRELL

CRITICISM of the above provokes declaration of one's own principles. To the Catholic literary critic, literature must first be *good* literature before its merits as *Catholic* literature can be considered at all. Without this criterion, it is just as useful to write a book on authors with wooden legs, or ginger hair, as to write a book on authors who happen to be, or to become, Catholics. The publishers' blurb talks big about Mr Hutton recalling 'what a great part of our literature we owe to a Catholic culture and civilization.' But the compiler of guide-books, history books, and one or two books on Art and Italian literature, is hardly likely to have qualifications for such a task. Result—a complete absence of critical relevance. To this can be ascribed (1) catalogues of names strung together without any discrimination, *e.g.* 'It might be claimed, however, without exaggeration, that the work of the poets, Coventry Patmore, Gerard Hopkins and Francis Thompson could only have been produced by a Catholic culture. If we add to these the names of Wilfrid Blunt, Alfred Douglas, Alice Meynell, Lionel Johnson, Ernest Dowson, Alfred Noyes, Hilaire Belloc and G. K. Chesterton, it is clear that Catholicism may claim to have a place, even a foremost place, in the poetry of the time, such as it has not occupied since the Reformation. Indeed, one of Francis Thompson's poems, *The Hound of Heaven*, must be as widely known as any poem of our time.' (2) Discussion of personalities rather than traditions—literary history and anecdotage rather than literary criticism. (3) Niminypiminy discussion of conversions of Dryden, Gibbon, and Newman. Of personal interest to Mr Hutton, maybe, in a work of literary criticism, an irrelevance. (4) When the pace flags, some good old Catholic campaigning. Religious muck-raking among the minor nineteenth century novelists or else funeral elegies over the English recusants, *e.g.*, on the martyrdom of Southwell. 'It is not our business here to dwell upon this dreadful scene, which it appals one to remember was but one of hundreds such, in which the Catholic martyrs gave their lives for the Faith in England. It is, no wonder that we have tried to hide the shameful name of Tyburn behind the parvenu mask of Marble Arch; but one

day perhaps a great basilica will rise by the spot hallowed with the blood of these English martyrs, dedicated in honour of the men who like their Master and their God gave their lives for the people.'

Positive suggestions ? Pressure of space compels me to be dogmatic and bibliographical. The barrier between the Middle Ages, and the Elizabethan and Jacobean Ages, created by non-Catholic academic scholarship, must be broken down. Elizabethan literature must be seen as the flowering of the mediaeval tradition. In the field of prose Mr Hutton is satisfied in potting R. W. Chambers's valuable essay on *The Continuity of English Prose*. That essay, which indicated how the mediaeval vernacular homily-books provided the substance for the prose of the Book of Common Prayer and the Authorised Version, is more important as an indication of a new line of research, than as being, in itself, a positive achievement of scholarship.

Again, one wishes the weight of learning of a Catholic scholar to emphasize clearly that the Elizabethan theatre audience was trained in mediaeval habits of thought. The feeling for *visual* allegory, begun by the miracle and morality plays (and, as Dr Owst has shown in *Literature and the Pulpit in Mediaeval England*, by the tradition of mediaeval pulpit oratory which runs from Langland to Bunyan) develops into the ability to appreciate the rich *verbal* imagery of the mature Shakespearean drama. The mediaeval traditions in minor Elizabethan drama have already been ably indicated by Mr James Smith in two articles in *Scrutiny*,[1] but much yet remains to be done in that field. Mr Hutton's discussion of Shakespeare's debt to Petrarch, and his brief reference to 'Measure for Measure' ('It is only understandable by a Catholic, grounded in Catholic principles and dogma'), seem rather inadequate. Mr Traversi, in his book *Approach to Shakespeare* and in a recent article on 'Measure for Measure,'[2] Mr Wilson Knight in the essays on 'Measure for Measure,' 'Troilus and Cressida,' and 'King Lear' in the *Wheel of Fire*, and Mr W. C. Curry in his book, *Shakespeare's Philosophical Patterns*, all seem to indicate further lines of research.

In brief, as a Catholic literary student I feel (and I am sure that others feel as I do) the urgent need of a critical, detailed and scholarly work to demonstrate how Mr Eliot's idea of an English literary tradition is to be equated with the Catholic literary tradition, and how the 'dissociation of sensibility' in the seventeenth century is to be equated with the decay of that Catholic tradition (Mr Hutton's facile plagiarism of Mr Basil Willey's thesis on Milton's Protestantism seems hardly satisfying). These issues, so baldly stated, are fundamental and complex and of great importance to the Catholic student of literature. It is to be hoped that the modern school of Catholic critics, comprising Messrs James Smith, D. A. Traversi, and G. M. Turnell, will offer us further guidance on the subject.

[1] 'Marlowe's "Dr Faustus,"' *Scrutiny*, June, 1939, and 'The Tragedy of Blood,' *Scrutiny*, December, 1939.

[2] 'Measure for Measure,' *Scrutiny*, Summer, 1942.

POTATO CROP

Round the year,
From the digging up of the thick clay in the paddock
To the sacking up of the spuds, he had worked for this.

Yellow clay,
Heavy to dig, you got it across the shoulders,
But you gave it its feed, like you'd give your horse or cow ;

Then the frost
Gave you a hand's turn, a sturdier fellow-worker
Than either the sun or the rain, though both are good.

Potato seed,
That was good, too, first class. It was satisfying
To set it, row after row, the red and the white,

To earth up,
And see the dark green haulms and those that were lighter
Top the straight furrows like foam on the crest of waves.

It did well.
Some of the neighbours didn't come off so lucky,
But the blight never touched it. The potato crop did well.

Food for four,
Raised with sweat, to last till the new potatoes,
Not now thought of, came round again next June.

The haulms turned.
Days of digging and digging and grading and grading,
And trundling unwieldly sacks from paddock to shed.

There they stood,
Lurching one on another like sodden drinkers,
Going on for a ton of them. Now they could rest.

So could he,
From the well-housed spuds. But soon there'd be swede, beet, carrot,
And the cookers and keepers that heavied the apple-trees,

Chicken-house
To build before winter, nanny to take to the billy,
And the clay to be turned ; greens, eggs, and a kid next spring.

All to do,
And all been done, at the edges of night and morning,
Lord knows how—well maybe He did know how.

Not much more
Than an acre. But when you work all day in an office
You couldn't expect to do more. It was this he loved,

This he thought
In the dark back of his mind, while he read attestations
And copied reports. It was this kept fertile his life.

Now she comes,
A worry between her brows, but her voice kept smiling.
Look, dear, she says, and hands him a mighty spud.

It was wet.
She'd come to the end of the first sack in the shelter,
Stocked with the spuds that had got the tine of the fork.

It was wet.
The first of the main-crop keepers, the splendid keepers,
The winter food for the four of them, was wet.

All week-end
He lugged out the drunken sacks, and trundled and emptied,
And stooped, and ached, and sifted the sound from the spoiled.

Three parts spoiled.
His heart ached more than his shoulders. Three parts rotten,
The Lord knew why. Well, maybe He does know why.

Round the year,
From the digging up of the thick clay in the paddock
To the digging in again of the rotten spuds,

One works for this.

ELEANOR FARJEON.

ON A POEM BY BAUDELAIRE

MARTIN TURNELL

'LA POÉSIE,' said Lautréamont, 'doit avoir pour but la vérité pratique.' It is characteristic of certain modern writers that their concern with spiritual problems gives their work what for want of a better word must be described as an extra-literary importance, and of no writer is this truer than of Baudelaire. The *Fleurs du mal*, as I have tried to show in another place,[1] is a circular tour of the modern world in which the poet explores with unsurpassed insight some of the great problems of his own time which is also our time. It must not be thought, however, that its value as a work of exploration is in some way independent of its value as poetry. Baudelaire was not, as Mr T. S. Eliot has alleged, important primarily as a 'human prototype of new experience' and 'only secondly because he was a poet.' It was because he was the greatest European poet of the nineteenth century that his work has an extra-literary importance and the aim of this note is to show the connection between the two.

'The only praise that I ask for this book,' wrote Baudelaire in the letter to Alfred de Vigny which accompanied a presentation copy of the second edition of the *Fleurs du mal*, 'is the recognition that it is not a mere collection of poems, but that is has a beginning and an end. All the new poems are designed to fit into a singular framework that I had chosen.' The *cadre singulier* is the base on which the *Fleurs du mal* is constructed and it gives the individual poems their distinctive pattern. For the unity of the work is so complete that the movement of the whole is reflected in its component parts. This movement is not a *forward* but a *circular* movement. The poems do not move forward from one fixed point to another like a monologue of Racine's or, to choose a very different example, a poem of Rimbaud's. Baudelaire selects a scene or a situation, examines it from every angle, but always returns to his starting point.

The *Beau navire* is not one of Baudelaire's greatest poems, but it is a fine poem and a striking illustration of his method :

> 'Je veux te raconter, ô molle enchanteresse !
> Les diverses beautés qui parent ta jeunesse ;
> Je veux te peindre ta beauté
> Où l'enfance s'allie à la maturité.'

Baudelaire's sensuous, flexible rhythms have a way of weaving themselves into our consciousness. In this poem he adopts the tone of whispered confidence which he often used with great effect and

[1] *Horizon*, August, 1941.

which gives his poetry its peculiar intimacy. The focal word is *diverses*. The poem is a catalogue of the woman's varied charms and their very potent influence on the poet. It is characteristic of Baudelaire's language that words are never merely descriptive ; they always have a psychological or moral connotation. *Molle enchanteresse* is a good example. *Molle* illustrates his sensitiveness to tacile sensations. You feel the hand stretching out to caress the woman, but it does so half-fearfully, hesitates, and withdraws as though expecting a rebuff. This conflict runs all through the piece. *Molle* describes the texture of the woman's skin, but it also suggests the weakness of the poet already half-yielding to temptation. The characteristics of the Baudelairean woman begin to emerge in the fourth line. The mixture of innocence and experience, the woman who had preserved something of the charm of the child and was familiar with the ways of the world had a strong fascination for the poet, and in *les Bijoux* he wrote :

> . . . la candeur unie à la lubricité
> Donnait un charme neuf à ses métamorphoses.'

In the next verse he introduces the image of the ship :

> ' Quand tu vas balayant l'air de ta jupe large,
> Tu fais l'effet d'un beau vaisseau qui prend le large,
> Chargé de toile, et va roulant
> Suivant un rhythme doux, et paresseux, et lent.'

The erotic significance of the skirt is evident. It reminds the poet naturally of a sail bellying before the wind, but the image of the ship is more complex. The sea is always a symbol of liberation in Baudelaire's poetry and here it offers a prospect of escape from the oppressive desires which crowd in upon him. The complexity lies in the ambivalent feeling of rising sexual desire and the desire to escape from its consequences. The intensity of the feelings increases in the last two lines where the light, airy movement of the skirt merges into the slow, heavy movement of the ship weighed down under its sails. The movement of the ship—the ' rhythme doux, et paresseux, et lent '—is also the slow, heavy movement of the blood which threatens to submerge the poet. The prospect of escape begins to fade.

> ' Sur ton cou large et rond, sur tes épaules grasses,
> Ta tête se pavane avec d'étranges graces ;
> D'un air placide et triomphant
> Tu passes ton chemin, majestueuse enfant.'

The clue to the third verse and, indeed, to the whole poem lies in the words *se pavane*. They describe the proud turn of the woman's head as she looks about her, but they also contain an allusion to dancing. For the poem is a pavan—' a stately dance in which the dancers were elaborately dressed '—danced by the mistress, and the décor is carefully built up by the use of the words *large*, *lent*, *placide*, *triomphant*, *majestueuse* and *nobles*. The movement of the third verse prolongs and develops the movement of the second ; the ' roll ' of the heavily laden ship is transformed into the stately dance.

The Baudelairean woman emerges still more clearly and some of her characteristics deserve emphasis. Baudelaire was not interested in the individual woman, but in particular qualities which are common to many women and in their effect on his own feelings. The feelings are highly complex, but the woman herself is a deliberately simplified figure. The poet depersonalises her, turns her into a mechanical courtesan who has only one function. We never perceive her features distinctly; we only have a general impression of a heavy, voluptuous beauty signified by *grasses* and *majestueuse*. *Placide* and *triomphant* are linked because they emphasise her stupidity and her hold over the poet. She is passive and unresponsive, but drains the life out of him. And we remember the bitter note in the diaries: 'Aimer les femmes intelligentes est un plaisir de péderaste.'

The fourth verse is a repetition of the first. It is not merely a refrain or a restatement of the main theme. It has a more important function. In the last line of the third verse the dancer seems—tantalisingly—about to pass across the stage and out of sight, cheating the poet's desires but also freeing him from the 'enchantresses's' toils. The refrain brings her back again so that he can continue his strange suit. The refrain is introduced after the third, sixth and ninth verses, marking the end of one movement of the dance and the beginning of the next. Baudelaire does not use the same refrain; he draws on the first, second and third verses in turn as this enables him to give a greater variety to his poem. The tempo is continually changing: images 'fade' into one another, a skirt into a sail, a sail back into a skirt. The refrain is a signal, too, for a change of angle. The dancer has been looked at full length. The focus suddenly shifts and, cinematograph-like, there follows a series of 'close-ups' of different parts of the body. The dancer, who has been a remote figure, turns and advances towards the watching poet and her charms at once become more potent:

> 'Ta gorge qui s'avance et qui pousse la moire,
> Ta gorge triomphante est une belle armoire
> Dont les panneaux bombés et clairs
> Comme les boucliers accrochent des éclairs;
>
> Boucliers provoquants, armés de pointes roses!
> Armoire à doux secrets, pleine de bonnes choses,
> De vins, de parfums, de liqueurs
> Qui feraient délirer les cerveaux et les coeurs!'

There is no need to stress the erotic symbolism of these lines. It will be noticed that though Baudelaire is considering different parts of the body, he has the same limited interest in the woman. She is a bed-fellow and no more. The *gorge triomphante* reinforces the *placide et triomphant* of the third verse. The

> 'Boucliers provoquants, armés de pointes roses!'

underline once more the poet's conflicting feelings. The *boucliers* stand for the serried ranks of the 'enemy' bearing irresistibly down on him. The whole force of the poem is behind them because it is a

description of an attack on the poet—an attack which is concentrated on a single weak place in his defences. The curve of a throat, of the panels of the cupboard, of the breasts are weapons in the enemy's armoury. The *boucliers* are *provoquants* because the poet, conscious of the hopelessness of the struggle—there is another reference back to *triomphante*—is constantly tempted to capitulate. It is a sign of Baudelaire's greatness that in spite of their extreme suggestiveness the words are never merely erotic; he invests them with an intense *moral* significance and huge vistas of sin and suffering open before us.

The cupboard with its 'good things,' its wines and mysterious perfumes is a recurring theme in his poetry. It is clearly a reminiscence of the child's furtive pleasure in rummaging in his mother's cupboard and in this way becomes an expression of the nostalgic longing of the grown man to return to a simpler age, to escape from the problems of manhood and from the sense of sin which weighs so heavily on him. Baudelaire's attention is always centred on his own feelings and his images nearly always lead back to the speaker.

The seventh verse is a repetition of the second, and it shows how the sudden switch from the close-up to the full-length image lowers the tension of the poem as each movement comes to an end. In the eighth and ninth verses we proceed a stage further:

> 'Tes nobles jambes, sous les volants qu'elles chassent,
> Tourmentent les désirs obscurs et les agacent,
> Comme deux sorcières qui font
> Tourner un philtre noir dans un vase profond.
>
> Tes bras, qui se joueraient des précoces hercules,
> Sont des boas luisants les solides émules,
> Faits pour serrer obstinément,
> Comme pour l'imprimer dans ton coeur, ton amant.'

These two verses seem to me to exhibit a pronounced falling off in quality. Their function is plain, but there is a gap between intention and execution which makes them inferior to what has gone before. It is not unusual for Baudelaire to exhaust the feelings that can profitably be extracted from a situation before reaching the end of a poem. The legs make the skirt belly like the sails, like the throat swelling provocatively beneath the *moire*, and the next line is an explicit—too explicit—statement of the effect on the poet. The sorcerers with their phials are a familiar part of the furniture of the *Fleurs du mal* but they have not worn well. The turning of the jar is intended to reflect the movement of the whole poem, but it weakens instead of strengthening the effect, diffuses instead of concentrating emotion. The gap between intention and execution is so palpable in the ninth verse that it does not call for detailed comment.

The tenth and last verse is a repetition of the third verse. At the close of the poem we are left watching the woman who is about to pass from the stage. We know that she will never go and that she will never satisfy the poet's desires. The poem is an allegory of the sexual act, but of a sexual act which never takes place. This explains the

sense of frustration that we feel in the repeated descriptions of uncompleted movements which are the substance of the poem.

Baudelaire was not in the ordinary sense a religious poet. 'His business,' wrote Mr Eliot, 'was not to practise Christianity, but—what was much more important for his time—to assert its *necessity*.'[1] He asserted its necessity by describing the dilemma of the man without faith and the heart of his work is a carefully cultivated *faiblesse*, a sense of interior collapse. His descriptions of the miseries of 'profane love' are part of his general undertaking. He believed that human love was one of the elements of the good life, was a means of resisting the disintegrating forces of contemporary civilisation, of providing a basis for human living in an inhuman age; but his experiences led to complete disillusionment. Like all great poets he set his personal stamp on certain words and one of the most important of them was *prostituer*. 'Qu'est-ce que l'amour?' he asked. 'Le besoin de sortir de soi. L'homme est un animal adorateur. Adorer, c'est se sacrifier et se prostituer. Aussi tout amour est-il prostitution.' The mechanical courtesan of the *Beau navire* and of other poems is a symbol of not merely of 'the new woman,' but of the new civilisation, of the vulgarisation and impoverishment of human life. 'L'amour dans l'acception humaine,' wrote the late Charles Du Bos, 'Baudelaire ne le ressent pas parce qu'il n'aime pas *l'autre* en tant qu'*autre*.—Toutefois, il existe chez Baudelaire une zone où, sinon l'amour à proprement parler et au sens complet du terme, du moins l'attache dans ce qu'elle peut comporter de plus forte se charge et même se sature d'humanité: la zone de la communauté, du compagnonnage dans la faute, la souffrance et le remords.'[2]

[1] *Selected Essays*, p. 370.
[2] *Approximations*, 5 ème serie, Paris, 1932, pp. 38-9.

THE SONS OF UISNEACH

When Deirdre with the sons of Uisneach came
from Alban and landed at this shore,
carried in strong sea arms from oak to sand,
this ancient man stood bent beneath his share

of grain-out-numbering years. He saw the woman
reluctant and afraid, and in her eyes,
the scalding mark, the wound of treachery;
and her three exiles ankle-deep in native ooze.

And saw them borne along the beating strand
to Connor's dun, the way to woeful shame;
and took the halter in his withered hand,
and swung the whip and drove his ass-cart home.

SEAN JENNETT.

NEW LIGHT ON LUCIFER

A Review of C. S. Lewis's *Preface to Paradise Lost*

DALLAS KENMARE

IN a recent broadcast talk on Beethoven, Mr Frank Howes, speaking of the fashionable craze for 'debunking'—to use an irritating modern catch-word—referred to a certain contemporary composer (who, in view of what follows, had better be nameless), as having been active in this pastime with regard to Beethoven. Mozart he mentioned also as a 'fluctuating commodity on the Stock Exchange of popularity.' Well, such activities are no doubt amusing to the perpetrators, but they would be far less pleased were they to realise that it is a pastime enjoyed only by the small-minded, for while a recognition and appreciation of greatness inevitably implies a certain degree of greatness in the observer, the reverse is equally true, so in the process of 'debunking,' all the 'debunkers' do is to reveal their own littleness of mental and spiritual stature, and never, as they apparently believe, enhance their own reputations.

It seems rather sad, to say the least of it, that others with minds of a nobler cast, in whom the divine quality of generosity is active, have to spend their energies on re-establishing the temporarily diminished reputations of the great. Nevertheless, when such work produces a book so pregnant with wisdom, so good-humoured, entertaining and scholarly (in the best sense of the word) as Mr C. S. Lewis's *Preface to Paradise Lost*,* the platitude about good coming out of evil is amply ratified. Other critics and scholars, notably Mr Charles Williams, Dr Tillyard, Prof. G. Wilson Knight and Mr Logan Pearsall Smith, have of late years been similarly engaged, and once the initial amazement that such work should ever be necessary, that great poets should ever be supposed to stand in need of rehabilitation, is overcome, the pleasure derived from the writing is unalloyed.

Mr Lewis, now a convinced Christian, shares with all sincere Christians the incapacity to write on any theme without relating it to the one theme of pre-eminent importance, Christianity, therefore his study of *Paradise Lost* has a genuine Christian and moral value. Especially useful is his emphasis on the *stupidity* of that greatly overpraised character in *Paradise Lost*, Satan, and, as a natural result,

* Oxford University Press, 1942. 7s. 6d.

the stupidity of sin. Not until the stupidity, the ultimate boredom, of wickedness is generally recognised will it lose the 'charm' it apparently holds for so many.† One day perhaps there will be novelists and dramatists enlightened and ingenious enough to make the Michaelas as attractive as the Carmens—but not until the thrilling difficulties, the adventurous, fighting qualities of the good life are understood and acknowledged. In a fallen world, goodness is really much more exciting (obviously so, one would have thought) than wickedness, being so much more difficult for 'fallen man, and the phrase too often and too unwisely admired, 'Evil be thou my good,' should be seen to include, as Mr Lewis remarks, 'Nonsense, be thou my sense.' Milton rightly felt that 'the detestable is in the long run also ridiculous,' and to overstress the magnificence and grandeur of his Satan, as so many commentators do, is to run the risk quite unwittingly of course) of succumbing to one of those subtle temptations so skilfully enumerated in Mr Lewis's own inimitable *Screwtape Letters*. Wickedness after all, is no more than childish naughtiness raised to a plane of quite fictitious dignity. There is, of course, sometimes a certain *aesthetic* grandeur in the portrayal of wickedness, but to stress this unduly can be dangerous, especially as, finally, aesthetics should lead, not to a glorification of sin, but to a passion for the trinity of Beauty, Truth and Goodness, which, true to the symbol of the Trinity, are 'not three eternals, but one eternal.'

Again, Mr Lewis's comments on what he calls the Stock Responses are of great value, showing very plainly to what a state of degeneracy contemporary life has fallen. Especially repellent is the reference to the man who after a spell in hospital could say that the 'only amusing thing' that happened was the death of the man in the next bed. Although this irresponsible and callous talk is often the mark of psychological maladjustment, it remains none the less deplorable.

For the rest, the scholarship, the satisfying study of the Epic, the careful and always fresh and enlightening analysis of Milton's poem, must be passed over with only a brief, but sincere, word of praise and gratitude. And it is good to remember, in these unhappy days, that Mr Lewis, during his reflections on the possible *good of evil*, remarks that 'Those who will not be God's sons become His tools'; hence there is no evil, however great, that may not, by the might of God's will, be used to further His purposes. A sobering reflection for the dictators!

† The ultimate ennui of wickedness is admirably revealed in Prof. Mario Praz's study, *The Romantic Agony*. Compare also the character of Spandrell in Aldous Huxley's *Point Counterpoint*.

FOR AN UNBORN CHILD

In the beginning of your springing time
cathedrals came down like epileptic giants,
the weary walls of palaces crumpled to dust
and on the street, in postures of repentless death,
this people felt the malignancy of bombs.

Yet, whether you be man or woman, know,
you there, warm and close at the wall of the womb,
that we too stretched for the sun in our warring time.
Even in days of blame there was careful husbandry,
and for a million eyes were pools of blood
those of this woman your mother dreamed back through forests
of time
to the start of love.

MILITARY HOSPITAL

When I went out there he was near his time
and only said 'goodbye.'
Waiting the last attack, he lay and watched
the shivering hands of the clock
stealing towards his hour
—the advancing hands of the clock—
strapped and ready
to go over into the night.

Now he would not I knew subdue his ruined flesh,
his mutinous flesh.
He lay in the fall of his flesh and cursed his luck.

JON WHITE.

A NOTE ON POETRY

ARTHUR MACHEN

THERE is a world elsewhere; its speech is called poetry.' And that is one of the many attempts to define the indefinite.

Others are, perhaps, better known. Wordsworth said that poetry was emotion recollected in tranquillity; with Matthew Arnold, it is a criticism of life; Milton held that it must be simple, sensuous and passionate. To Edgar Allan Poe, poetry is the rhythmical creation of supernal beauty. And, no doubt, there are other essays towards the definition of poetry.

But to be concrete; to approach the question in the spirit of Thomas Gradgrind, the Hard Fact man: here are some lines from the work of a great and venerated poet

> . . . danger cannot but attend
> Upon a Function rather proud to be
> The enemy of falsehood, than the friend
> Of truth, to sit in judgement than to feel.

The Function, it may be explained, is the attempt to subject the poetic process to systematic and logical prose analysis; and the quoted lines express Wordsworth's opinion that this procedure is incompetent and ineffective. Probably, Wordsworth was right; but the question is, whether the passage itself is poetry in the true sense of the word. That question we must try to solve.

Poetry, not prose, came first in time, and at the very beginnings of poetry in Europe, something strange happened. With all respect to that great multitude of Bards and Seers and Skalds, who uttered their incantations without record remaining, I suppose we may say that the verse of Europe began with Homer and Hesiod. Conjecturally, one lived in the ninth century B.C., the other in the eighth. It doesn't matter in the least what views you may happen to hold upon the authorship of the poems called Homeric; it signifies little that Homer—if there were a Homer—was probably born at Smyrna, and that Hesiod's father came from Cyme, also in Asia Minor. It remains that the body of literature in verse which stands under these two names is the earliest known in Europe. Homer, they say, wrote somewhere in the ninth century B.C.; Hesiod in the eighth. Both used the same dialect of Greek, both the same metre. But, while Homer's hexameters uttered the splendour and the terror of the great battle beneath the walls of Troy, and the wonders and enchantments that befel Ulysses before he won back to Ithaca at last through many perilous seas: Hesiod wrote of simple things for simple country

people. He had nothing to say of the great clanging battle for Troy, nothing of the Lotus Eaters, of that land where it seemed always afternoon. He never touched at Calypso's fairy isle, or showed the horrid transmutation of Circe's magic cup, or partook of the fruit that ripened all the year in the gardens of Alcinous. Instead of all this, he made the music of his rolling hexameters discourse wise saws and simple instances. He had a dispute with his brother about their father's will, and advises that a friendly settlement on a fifty-fifty basis may pay better than taking the quarrel into the Courts. Hesiod, in fact, held that, even in simple, sleepy Bœotia, the Law was 'an edged tool of uncertain application, very expensive in the working, and rather remarkable for its properties of close shaving than for its always shaving the right person.' And so he says, summing up the case, 'the half is better than the whole.' The proper study of mankind, in Hesiod's opinion, is eminently man: the man in the street and on the land, going about his everyday business, given sometimes to odd tricks and manners, occasionally prejudiced, sometimes over-optimistic. Hesiod notes his ways: he observes in a fine line that 'Potter hates potter, and one craftsman another,' or, as we put it in simple prose: 'Two of a trade never agree.' He has advice to offer: 'Don't be too sure; a good deal may happen between the lip and the brim of the cup.' Such is the sense of his resonant, heroic line, and here we agree with Hesiod that the warning word deserves to be set to music; and so we say, 'There's many slip 'twixt the cup and the lip'— and that, not a doubt of it, is sound sense. But again, the question arises, as it arose over that passage from Wordsworth: whether in resonant Greek or in simple English, is the line poetry?

However that may be, the double tradition of Homer and Hesiod maintained itself through all the ages of European versification. There is the exquisite felicity of the Horatian ode, with its sad undying music of all love and pleasure and delight passing away, of all the flowers fading, of the cypress as the sole abiding tree. But Horace also walked the streets of Rome much in the spirit of Thackeray perambulating St. James's and Mayfair; amused, acute, observant of men and manners. He wrote, too, an excellent versified manual of dramatic poetry full of weighty precepts, many of which are as applicable to-day as ever they were; in the spirit, if not in the letter. Thus, Horace bids his playwright to beware of solving those difficulties in the last act by producing a god from the machine, 'unless,' he says, 'you have got your plot and your characters into such a terrific knot that there is no other way of loosening it.' Bearing this maxim in mind, our modern reviewer of novels may often murmur to himself as he comes to the last page: 'rather a case of much ado about very little,' and, 'that last coincidence was a bit thick.' And then, there is:—

. . . mediocribus esse poetis
Non homines, non Di, non concessere columnæ.

'Neither angels nor men, nor publishers can stand second-rate poetry.'

Cantankerous authors will note with gratification that Horace considers publishers to be sub-human; but, this little stroke apart: what a sensible, what an excellent observation; a sort of 'Trespassers will be Prosecuted' notice on the gate which leads to the Sacred Grove of Poetry.

But why on earth didn't Horace say it in prose? One is reminded of the story of the theatrical luggage and the Stuttering Tenor. At the last moment, just as the Guard was going to wave his flag, the Prima Donna Assoluta became anxious about the Company's belongings. She hailed the Tenor, the first man she saw, and urged him hysterically to run and make sure—'or we shan't be able to open at Hanley on Monday Night.' He ran like a hare down the platform, recollected that it would take him three or four minutes to deliver the message in common speech, and so chanted to the porter in resonant recitative from *Trovatore*: 'Is all the Company's baggage in the van?'

And, then again, there is the similar and even more striking instance of Virgil, who wrote in the Æneid that tremendous epic of the rise and majesty of Rome. He felt that a Treatise on Farming in all its branches would fit the times and the will and pleasure of Augustus Caesar; and so he cast his maxims, cautions, processes, and recipes into hexameter verse and the measure of the Æneid. One of these recipes instructs the beekeeper how to get a swarm of bees by burying a calf. I believe the method is now obselete, at least in scientific apiarian circles.

The tradition of delivering in verse matter, which most of us would emphatically declare to be an affair for prose, persisted through the ages. I believe that there are circles where the late A. E. Housman is honoured, not for his 'Shropshire Lad,' but for his critical edition of the 'Astronomica' of Manilius; a poem on Astrology in five books, says the Classical Dictionary. Skipping a few centuries, and coming to our own country, we have Tusser's poem on Husbandry. Later, there is Dyer's 'Fleece.' But Dr Johnson objects 'that the woolcomber and the poet appear to be such discordant natures, that an attempt to bring them together is to *couple the serpent with the fowl*.' There was a poem also on how to grow apples and the right way of making cider—technically excellent, said an expert—and there was Grainger's 'Sugar Cane,' made immortal by a passage in Boswell.

'Having talked of Grainger's "Sugar Cane," I mentioned to him Mr Langton's having told me, that this poem, when read in manuscript at Sir Joshua Reynolds', had made all the assembled wits burst into a laugh, when, after much blank-verse pomp, the poet began a new paragraph thus:

"Now, Muse, let's sing of *rats*."

And what increased the ridicule was, that one of the company, who slily overlooked the reader, perceived that the word had been originally *mice*, and had been altered to *rats*, as more dignified.'

And: I have never seen Darwin's 'Loves of the Plants'—is it called that?—but I should suppose that the indicated attempt to suffuse

a metrical manual of the Linnæan system of Botany with sentiment must be even more preposterous than Dr Grainger's cry to his Muse to help him to sing of Rats.

Well ; this is but a bald and skeleton account of a long and curious history : the persistent and serious employment of verse on matters which are not in the least fit for that medium, which are eminently suited for prose exposition. Among these matters I would reckon Hesiod's advice to litigants, Horace's hints for playwrights, Virgil's treatise on farming, and Dr Grainger's work on the sugar-cane. And I would include also Wordsworth's discussion of the principles of poetical criticism in the medium of laborious and unmusical blank verse.

However, it is on a comic note that the history of the misappropriation of the verse-form ends. It has been taken into the service of commerce, and helps to sell useful articles of trade. Somewhat in this fashion :

When life is drear
Try *Robert Elsmere*

and

Lost your pal ?
Read *Das Kapital.*

Indeed, the art of wedding verse to advertisement is not so modern after all. It must be more than a hundred years since these lines were written :

If I know'd a donkey wot wouldn't go
To see Mrs Jarley's wax-work show,
Do you think I'd acknowledge him ?
Of, no, no !
Then run to Jarley's—

But the vital question is, not how this odd practice has ended, but how it began ; and here the difficulties are great and the matter deeply obscure. To go back as far as we may into origins, I think we may take it as sure that men sang before they spoke. In other words, the common belief that ordinary, modern speaking is natural, and singing artificial is false. To Jones of Surbiton, who prospers in the City, common speech is, doubtless, natural, and song an art to be acquired with pains and perseverance—if it is to be a pleasing song. But if you could go back to Jones's grandfather, who lived Mynyddisllwyn way or in the parish of Llanfihangel Torfaen, you would hear that gentleman's voice rising and falling in measured tones, with eloquent modulations and singing closes. His voice had its ordered and various inflections and intonations ; very much after the fashion of the Epistle Tone and the Gospel Tone which you may hear in church any Sunday if you like to go to High Mass—especially if the Use is that of Sarum. Old Mr Jones's speech was in fact a song ; though a very simple song. The tune of that old, natural speech was not always simple. In the year 1907, when I was enjoying that famous holiday of mine on the stage, I was touring in the fit-ups and the smalls, and found myself in the town of Morpeth in Northumberland. Three or four of the

Company had got into the same rooms ; very decent rooms, though the atmosphere suggested that no window and scarcely any door had been opened for fifty years. Well, somebody spoke of tea, and the lodging-house servant observed : 'You need not worry ; your tea will be all ready for you in half-an-hour' She 'observed ?' Rather she chanted a strange and haunting melody, a fragment of song from a ruined realm of faery, or, perhaps, a curious variant of the Antiphon, *Vidi Aquam.*

And such was the first speech of man ? Certainly, the first utterance of man that deserved the name of speech But, perhaps, it may be lawful to conjecture that there was a time when this ancestral mammal deserved the title of stick-in-the-mud ; he was of the earth, earthy. He signified his wants and his emotions after the fashion of the beasts and birds, his companions. He had his vocal system, more elaborate, perhaps, than that of his fellows ; an affair of growls and grunts, howls and screams and vague, murmuring noises ; unformed, unshapen sounds that meant 'pterodactyls,' 'ware mammoth,' 'meat,' 'drink,' 'Mrs Mud, I want you,' and so forth. Indeed, there are people who still speak this ancient language : grunts and snarls and growls have survived the age of the iguanodon.

And then : something happened to this being ; something very extraordinary. Its nature and effect are both in deep doubt. There are, roughly, two schools of thought who hold diametrically opposite views on the question, One body of opinion considers that from this far-off event, everything began to go wrong ; but other men maintain that from this change, or development, or whatever you like to call it, everything began to go right.

Years ago, my very old friend, Arthur Edward Waite and I found ourselves in that pub. of happy memories, the *Yorkshire Stingo*, in the Marylebone Road. Waite had observed the sign, and boldly asked for a glass of Yorkshire stingo. The landlord laughed, said he hadn't got any Stingo, and suggested Burton. Waite grumbled at the time ; but afterwards he moralised the affair in a collection of Aphorisms. The paragraph ran something like this :–

> Once, wandering by a dull and dusty byway of this mortal life, I came upon a tavern called the Yorkshire Stingo. I went in, and asked for Stingo ; but there was none. So the Universe continually promises Stingo ; but it has none to give us.

And, somewhat after the same fashion, Thomas Hardy, meditating on the general misery of mankind, thought that the human mind had so developed throughout the ages that it had come to demand of life the satisfaction of all manner of wants and desires, longings and aspirations, which life had no power to fulfil or satisfy. And the being who is consumed by a longing for the non-existent may justly be deemed mad. Waite, I think, held that, somewhere and somewhen, the traveller would be refreshed in full measure with the new wine of the Kingdom ; but Hardy could not believe in such a festival. And so, a good materialist friend of mine once remarked to me that,

though he loved high poetry, yet, as an alienist, he held it to be a form of mania. If he had been put to it, I think he would have declared that the lark was not a blithe spirit, but a bird ; and that nightingales were not immortal.

And there, I believe, the dividing line between the two schools that are opposed on this question is clearly marked The one party, if it would be frank, must hold that man went mad ; the other set will have it that he got up from the ground and began to see life.

At any rate ; he began to do very strange things. He found that he could not relish the content of pot or pan or bowl unless a rude ornament of one sort or another ran round the rim He painted pictures of beasts and battles on the walls of his cave. He made graven images, he took to dancing in set measures. He turned the grunts and growls and howls of the old muddy days into a song. But I believe it would be very dangerous to be dogmatic as to the origins of poetry ; that strictly measured speech moving by sure laws, making its more special appeal to the ear than the speech of common use. Perhaps it was the specific language of rites and incantations, holy or unholy, celebrated in dark places and on high places : a sacred form of utterance reserved for sacred and secret things, gradually becoming known and used for the exterior as well as for the interior ceremonies. With Homer it was still an utterance set apart for the world of wonder and of terror and of beauty ; but soon after Homer's day, Hesiod—as we have seen—was using this language of enchantment to enforce the homeliest lessons of practical common-sense. It must be said, that he also wrote what might be called A Metrical Church Catechism ' ; but in his most characteristic work, writing at the dawn of European literature, his viewpoint was essentially the same as that of Alexander Pope, writing in the reigns of Queen Anne and the first Georges. This must remain a very strange thing : as if one set a recipe for apple-dumplings to the Londonderry Air—or told the strollers that their tea would be ready in half-an-hour in the song of the fairy birds of Rhiannon. Perhaps, the fact was, that if a thing was to be written down it had to be written in verse-form. Prose was not regarded as a possible medium for the permanent. Prose, singing prose, was good enough for chat ; but the thing that mattered, Literature, must be expressed in verse.

Anyhow : so it happened in the beginning of western literature, and so it has been happening ever since ; and it does not seem that anyone found this common usage of a sacred speech strange, distasteful, or unbecoming. Nobody, it appears, wondered that Virgil should sing of the great deeds and adventures of pious Æneas and of crops that exhaust the soil in the same tones, to the same tune. Formally the Romans of the Augustan Age still called any man who wrote in the verse-form 'a sacred bard,' but they evidently saw nothing queer, nothing objectionable in the bard using his sacred mode of utterance to describe Fast Life in Rome—or Beekeeping. Horace called himself *Musarum Sacerdos*, the priest of the Muses ; speaking as a Hierophant

of the Mysteries, he bids the profane, the uninitiated, stand far off: but he uses the liturgical language—that is, verse—for the telling of some very funny stories. In one respect, this use of the verse-form in treating of matters which have no relation to poetry in the proper sense of the word must be said to be justified. No one can be sorry that Dryden attacked the Whig dogs and the bad versifiers of his age in verse; and one cannot think calmly of Pope's character of Addison being delivered in prose. Satire is not poetry, since satire is the expression of dislike, contempt, hatred; and these are by no means sacred or poetic springs; but the metre and the rhyme make 'Atticus' deadly. If it had been written in prose, it would probably have been merely ill-mannered and tartly disagreeable. Pope spoke nothing but the truth when he said he lisped in numbers. He was, by nature and of origin, *numerosus*; verse was his native speech and prose an acquired idiom. Honest Johnson held that Pope and Poetry were synonyms; if Pope's work be not poetry, he said, then where is poetry to be found? But the Doctor wrote of 'Lycidas': 'In this poem there is no nature, for there is no truth; there is no art, for there is nothing new. Its form is that of a pastoral, easy, vulgar, and therefore disgusting.' Johnson sincerely held that 'Lycidas' was trash, and unpleasant trash at that.

Yet: 'Lycidas' is poetry, and Pope's satire of Addison is not. And why not?

Let us return to our definitions. There is Wordsworth's famous 'emotion recollected in tranquillity.' Clearly, this will not serve us. The emotion thus recollected may certainly find its expression, and often does find its expression, in prose. Sir Walter Scott, roaming over the Cheviots as a young man in search of Border Ballads, experienced certain emotions which he recollected in middle age, and re-embodied them in Dandie Dinmont of 'Guy Mannering.' Dickens saw and smelt Debtors' Prisons when he was a boy, and knew how the darkening day gloomed among the mists of the Medway marshes: look for the recollections and magic reflections of these emotional experiences in 'David Copperfield,' 'Little Dorrit,' and 'Great Expectations.' Jingle's flight with the Spinster Aunt, and the chase after him of Mr Pickwick and Mr Wardle are reminiscences of the reporter's midnight rushes to catch the edition of the *Chronicle*: stormy weather, a world without of black darkness, ill-made roads, a plunging, jolting chaise, drunken postboys, and the transcribing the shorthand notes of Lord John Russell's speech by the quivering glimmer of a carriage-lamp. It would be temerarious to assume that the mind of Emily Brontë was ever in a state of tranquillity; but her recollections of the dreadful heights and hollows of the Haworth scene took the form of prose in 'Wuthering Heights.'

As for Matthew Arnold's 'criticism of life,' it really won't do. In a sense, one cannot object to life, because it includes everything, from a Meditation on the Four Last Things to the discovery of an obese caterpillar in the salad. In another sense, Life is as objectionable as

Nature ; both words, covering everything, therefore signify nothing. But if we are to use English in its usual and traditional sense, a criticism of anything is a reasoned judgment on that thing. It must exclude passion and emotion, it must shut out prejudice of every kind. It must banish all intuitions, half-hints, and intimations which are not logical propositions ; it must view the facts and all the facts, and balancing the favourable evidence against the unfavourable, deliver its considered, final sentence—*splendida arbitria.*

Full fathom five is not like that. It is not a weighed and balanced judgment on life or on anything else. It is not based on facts of any kind. It is an outburst of simple, sensuous, and passionate emotion.

And that brings us to Milton's famous utterance. Poetry, he says, must be simple, sensuous, and passionate. He is right ; and that is why we are bold to say and bound to say that the Wordsworthian passage quoted above, is not poetry :—

> . . . danger cannot but attend
> Upon a Function rather proud to be
> The enemy of falsehood, than the friend
> Of truth, to sit in judgement than to feel.

This passage is based on the Syllogism—in *Camestres* :—

A fervid and friendly approach is required for the consideration of poetical questions.

A formal logical analysis in prose excludes such an approach.

Therefore : A prose analysis is not a suitable method of investigating the poetic process.

Clearly then, the verse is not simple, involving as it does the construction of a syllogism ; it certainly excludes sensuous images—a Function sitting in judgment can hardly be called a sensuous image—and it is founded not on passion but on reason. Therefore, again, it is not poetry.

But though Milton gives us the qualities—or some of the qualities—of poetry, he does not define the thing in itself. He tells us what it is like ; but not what it is. He omits, for example, the very difference of poetry which formally distinguishes it from prose : that is, its measured appeal to the ear, or rather, through the ear. Note and underline, 'measured.' Fine prose usually or always appeals to the ear :—

And the door shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of music shall be brought low.

Here, indeed, is an appeal to the ear, but it is not a measured appeal ; it is not constructed according to a fixed metrical system. It perfectly fulfils the Miltonic definition by qualities, being eminently simple, sensuous and passionate, and yet it is not poetry since it lacks metre. The matter of poetry is there, but not the mode. So, a speaker's voice may be musical—that is, sweetly sounding—but his speech is not music, which demands a procession of tones moving by fixed laws.

Milton's definition, then, must be rejected as insufficient : there remains the word of the marvellous Edgar Allan Poe. He defines

Poetry as the rhythmical creation of supernal beauty; and I do not see that anything can be added to the phrase or taken from it. It expresses in exact and concrete form the vaguer, 'there is a world elsewhere; its speech is called poetry'; which Poe condenses into one word, supernal. It includes all that should be included; it excludes all that should be excluded; it is the perfect definition.

It seems, then, that accepting Poe's essential definition, and Milton's phrase as a qualitative comment on it, we are in a position to distinguish between verse, however fine, however exquisite, and pure poetry. But before we go further on our voyage of discovery of poetry—ten leagues beyond the wide world's end—it may be well to look to our baggage. Some of it we cannot take with us. It is hard lines, perhaps; but it is absolutely necessary to leave our common sense behind. Lemuel Gulliver, at the court of Brobdingnag found, as he looked at the maids of honour, that his eyesight was microscopic; and that these lovely ladies were by no means what they seemed to their gigantic lovers Gulliver's glances penetrated a little way and but a very little way beneath appearance: modern science, using more powerful and more delicate instruments, has comfortably assured us that the visible, tangible, phenomenal world of things does not bear the faintest resemblance in act or fact to that world as it is apprehended by science. Our common sense tells us that it is this, that, and the other; science declares, firmly and distinctly, that it is wildly remote from this, that, or the other. The table and chair as they seem to the ordinary man are not a bit like that table and chair as they are known by the scientific man. An old discovery enough: it was noted long ago that when the Astronomer Royal leaves his Observatory, his hat seems bigger to him than the moon. And, therefore, we may the more readily agree to refrain from talking of common sense when we look at that world of vision which is poetry

For, apart from theories and theorems, facts are stubborn things Here is one of then:—

> Full fathom five thy father lies;
> Of his bones are coral made;
> Those are pearls that were his eyes;
> Nothing of him that doth fade,
> But doth suffer a sea-change
> Into something rich and strange.

There are, indeed, two hard facts here—the first is that those lines are poetry, and high poetry; the second is, that their content is wildly remote from common sense or anything approaching common sense.

Again:—

> Hail to thee, blithe Spirit!
> Bird thou never wert,
> That from heaven, or near it
> Pourest thy full heart
> In profuse strains of unpremeditated art.

Common sense is convinced that a lark is a bird.

And finally, and best and highest of all—as I believe:—

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird !
No hungry generations tread thee down ;
The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown :
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home
She stood in tears amid the alien corn ;
The same that oft-times hath
Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

I do not think it is necessary to labour the point, that these lines are wildly remote from common sense. But it may be of interest to recall that a very few years ago, a critic of repute stated in his highly reputable newspaper that, since Keats supposed nightingales to be immortal, he was, evidently, a poet rather of fancy than imagination ; that is, I suppose, a minor, not a major, poet.

But, in deed and beyond dispute, these lines, and, especially, the last two of them, are of the very heart, and core, and essence of poetry. Their loveliness, I take it, is undisputed ; but it is not the loveliness of earth—of common sense—it is the loveliness of that world which is elsewhere, of that loveliness of which Shelley spoke in *Adonis*—who is Keats.

He is a portion of that loveliness
Which once he made more lovely.
. . . A portion of the eternal, which must glow
Through time and change, unquenchably the same.

And, it is to this world of vision and ecstasy, to this world elsewhere, to Edgar Allan Poe's sphere of supernal beauty, that the whole body of poetry must be referred. The nearer it approaches to that land which is very far off, the closer it approaches the perfect utterance of the poet.

As Wordsworth justly intimated in his laborious blank verse, common sense, or the logical understanding, is going beyond its powers in attempting to adjudicate in the High Court of poetry. Many years ago, though by no means of the examining craft, I ventured to set a paper which dealt with our present subject amongst others germane to it. My poetry question ran :—

' " Faery lands forlorn." Draw a map of the district in question, putting in principal towns, and naming exports.'

We know that it cannot be done. We are in a fix. We cannot define, since the matter is indefinable. We cannot deny, since we know it is there. We must be content to follow in the steps of those who profess the most exact science of mathematics, and accept hints, symbols, words half-uttered, almost subterfuges. We see the flower on the wall ; that is certain. It is also certain that we know nothing essential about it.

Flower in the crannied wall,
I pluck you out of the crannies,
I hold you here, root and all, in my hand,
Little flower—but *if* I could understand
What you are, root and all, and all in all,
I should know what God and man is.

It is true that Botany will give us a good deal of information, some of it curious and interesting enough, about the little flower ; but Botany deals in surface and appearance, not in being and essence. There might be people who would be interested to have information about the teeth in Keats' head ; but this would not help them to know Keats.

So, after all, we must be content with such intimations as the poets afford us, if we wish to know something of their work and of that supernal world which they inhabit—now and then. As I was saying, we must be content with what we have, as the mathematicians are, presumably, content with what they have. We all know that no man hath seen a Line at any time, since length without breadth is, necessarily, invisible. It seems tolerably certain that there never were such creatures as Gorgons or Dragons ; but there might have been ; their existence would not outrage the laws of reason. But the Line of Geometry, and its Plane Surface—which has no depth—are contradictions in terms. They are not, and they cannot be. As for the Point, which has neither Parts nor Magnitude ; this belongs to pure transcendence. And all three elementary definitions of the most exact of the sciences are like nothing but those dreams which are shattered into glittering dust at the moment of waking, since they cannot endure before the presence of the waking world.

Nevertheless ; we take a brave pencil and make a mark on the paper and make believe that it is, indeed a Line. We draw something like a table-top, and are bold to call it a Plane Surface. Again, the pencil digs downward on the white expanse ; and a small black blob of carbon appears and stands for the Point—which is, and yet is not. And, on these foundations of dream, a mighty science, and a sure science—as we believe—is firmly built.

So let Shelley's Lark remain a spirit, and let Keats's Nightingale abide immortal : in that world which is elsewhere ; which is the very world.

Or, we may say—if you like it better so—that there is in the human consciousness, as it were a space or tract which is sensitive to the approach and presence of poetry and painting, of music and architecture, to that dim, unconjectured region whence all these arise : in fine, to the arts. This tract is utterly independent of the logical understanding, of common sense, and of reason—in the popular, and not the Coleridgean significance of the word. This territory, with poetry and the other arts which flourish in it, is not merely of the nature of man, it is man, it is that which makes man to be what he is. Its presence in the consciousness is that which differences man from pig, however learned the pig may be.

If this tract must have a name, perhaps it should be styled Wonder : though Coleridge, in ' Kubla Khan,' calls it Xanadu.

POEM

The heather burned his thighs,
in purple waves sprang at his strong
loins, while the horizon trembled
with heat and out of a brass sky
the vertical sun beat his head
like a loud booming gong.

The fiery moor tilted and dropped
down the crumbling peat-hags to the dry
ghyll that spoke his thirst, and climbed
to the reeling miles between the high
crags and the Force, brown with rust.
Bog-cotton waved white flags
of truce, ignored ; for pollen dust
drifted into the brain and choked thought
till rock broke out, lipped over
into a down-dimpling dale, and earth
flung at his feet a bubbling river.

The water washed out his thirst,
green fingers stroked his eyes,
and the levelling sun lighted the girl
beneath an ash-tree's slim
shade, where the wind caught up a curl
that tugged his heart with sunset gold.

O and it was easy to fall
into a green sleep, thigh over thigh,
desire fading with daylight, to wake
from dew-drenched sleep to see
star-laden branches on a velvet sky.

The river told him love was worth
all the stars that dusted the night,
and slipped down the loud hills
that cradled his course to the high north.

Which he remembered when the whipcord wind
drove the sand across Libyan miles.
Machines roared a hot hell
of noise which whelmed the river's smile,
mirage of scorched and warring mind.
But the day was grief ; the gun
stuttered its syllables of red pain ;
he watched the drops curdle, while
thought returned upon bewildered tracks.

The dazed sun reeled in his brain
and burned along his memory, that turned
at bay under death's fierce crags.
The heather sprang and flowered, the moor
broke in waves upon the swart fell
till the sun was out, but it was easy to tell
her lips' sweetness again, and to touch her hand
which reached across thirsty seas to this last land.

ROBIN ATTHILL.

MANY MUST HAVE PATIENCE . . .

JOHN BISHOP

THE important thing was to keep breaking up the silence. Now and then he spoke aloud.

'I am aware of being alone in the Mediterranean Sea,' he said, his voice sounding small, 'The Mediterranean sea seems fairly buoyant and not too cold. In fact I stand a very good chance indeed.'

Though truly he was aware of nothing but the overpowering possessiveness of this sea, calmly setting a claim on him. So surely that it could wait its time. For instance, it was quite surprising what a long time it was before his thick Air Force tunic and trousers became fully saturated. And again it was several hours later before he had any sensation that his right to being a small but impregnable island of himself was to be threatened. Quite a long time, in fact, before it became clear that this sea was jealous of his persistence.

He decided to open his eyes every two hours. Two hours was a clear space in his mind, marked by reason of many spells of guard duty at an earlier time. This he did with quite remarkable accuracy, even though he half slept much of the time. But all he saw were stars overhead and starry white froth spilling over black walls of water on either side.

Early on, too, he worked out a plan for a small re-arrangement of controls. He related his arguments in its support very clearly, one to another. But later he suddenly laughed at himself, a ridiculous drowning Sergeant Pilot concocting neatly formulated plans, a comical pin point of thought, alone in this void. The sound of his own laughter was terrifying. It seemed to come from overhead, from another time.

He was sorry to say goodbye to his jacket, but it was growing too heavy, losing it seemed like losing some important link.

Yet, seeing again and again in his mind a white strip of hills that had surely not been far distant, he took strength from reminding himself

that his own precious part of the bargain still remained good. It might yet be the deciding part. So later he did nothing but shore up strength on this one idea of his very good chance. So that it was not really a great surprise when the shingle beach abruptly pushed his feet away from him, only a sudden warmth about the heart.

Coming then out of these hours of silence, a place he loved, a place that had meant so much happiness as a boy, to whose perfect crescent bay he had returned again and again, surely this place had a perfectly natural claim on him. He had always looked upon it as his own bay And so, in the very early morning light, he saw familiar outlines ; the two headlands, and higher up the scattered white houses just taking shape.

He never knew how he managed to reach the low stone wall at the top of the beach. Beside him he noticed a long rusty hook in the wall. Here Paolo, the innkeeper's son had always tied his rowing boat. But he was now too tired even to give thanks, even to wonder at these things.

Somewhere behind his eyes a great orchestra was playing. Row upon row of violins were giving song to a theme that rose and tossed in vast fluid statements. The song, a clamour of mounting waves, grew louder and louder in his head. His limbs began to know a new airy lightness, having no demanding pressure about them any longer. Very gently he was lifted up into sleep, and in that instant he saw the growing light give sudden life to the trembling leaves of a tree, ragged and spinous, spreading like a map over his brain, like a pattern of nerves.

Wonderful that the tree of olives, dark and watchful on the skyline, has not forgotten the fullness, the sunny richness of the lives it touches. For those who have lived on its shores through centuries, drawing life itself from its oil and its fruit, have again and again looked into these branches for a rebirth of kindliness, of indolence, industry, yes, but if you like it better, indolence.

It seems only a little while ago that the stone weights were gently lowered and the sweet oil was running out of the great wooden presses. Outside in the square the sun is hot and the vintner sits under a large coloured umbrella. There is a dish of olives beside his plate and he takes them up one by one as he talks with pride of harvests, of daughters soon to be brides. Though half asleep the oil presser nods agreeably.

But now the oil presser and the vintner are being swept into a vast crowd. In the Piazza del Popolo all are looking towards a platform where a man in a black uniform is gesticulating violently, mad as a marionette. The speakers face betrays fear, but he has gone so far and there is now no going back. The vintner and the oil presser sin and are sinned against, standing there in the heat of the day, listening to their death sentence in each machine-gun burst from his lips. The speaker seems not to have heard of the heat of the day He is talking of labour, relentless labour, of building, of struggling of new harvests on other shores.

And I shall bring you an olive branch,' he screams. He is lying, he has been told to tell lies.

But look again to the olive tree and you will still find warmth, still kindliness, preserved there in the instant the light floods between its dark pointed leaves. There are many who must be lost in the wilderness. Many must have patience. But in a little while. . . .

The young man who had stepped out of the sea slept on until the sun was high above him. Waking, he saw again the same veinous form resolve itself softly before his eyes into the shape of the olive tree. Then looking down at his clothes he found he did not recognise them. Extraordinary. All he knew was that he had nearly drowned. How often had he told young Paolo about the state of the boat. Probably every time he set out with rods and lunch for the islands. But the boy always forgot, preferring to spend long lazy hours, his line taut between brown fingers, watching the fantastic rainbow fish turning swiftly in the cool depths.

But where was Paolo now ? And what on earth was the reason for finding himself on the beach in these unfamiliar rags, and for this fatigue and this hunger ? Why he couldn't even recall how this particular holiday had begun. Which was ridiculous of course.

He found he was losing hold on his thoughts, feeling content for a while to smile vaguely at the small alert green lizards, sunning themselves for an instant on the wall, darting back into hiding. Stretching out his hand to grab one, it disappeared magically. Surely it was once a favourite game. Hadn't they an odd way of slipping loose of their tails if you caught them. They grew new ones. Long ago he had proudly displayed his collection of Ligurian lizards' tails to envious schoolmates.

In a sudden wave of annoyance he tried to rise but found himself too weak. Why didn't someone come ? Anne must be up there at the villa, worrying about him. Why wasn't Paolo there to help him up the steep hillside. Probably paying his respects to the baker's plump daughters as usual.

Compelled to be patient, he fell to thinking about Anne and discovered a small sense of guilt. Perhaps in many little ways he was neglecting her. Was he, after all, taking it too much for granted that she enjoyed these holidays as much as he. At any rate, to-morrow they would take the bus into San Remo, lunch rather well, explore twisting lanes, villa gardens, small amusing shops whose pottery and statues overflowed out into the street. He must plan more of those sort of days she loved, hear her laughter more often. Altogether too much of this endless fishing, bathing, reading, too much indolence. After all, the ten days must be nearly up, but what was so difficult to remember was exactly when and how they had begun. . . .

Later on he heard voices. Between the fat, dusty arms of the cacti he could see an old woman and a girl on the hillside road. They were taking about him. The old woman's voice was shrill and full of alarm. The girl answered calmly.

He heard her say, 'Why should I be afraid, Margherita, I always go to the beach in the morning, I *must* go, there's no danger.'

Now, the old woman was hurrying up the hillside but the girl had passed out of his sight. He guessed she was on her way down and a moment later he saw her, a peasant girl, slight and delicate with black curls clustered on her shoulders, coming towards him. She had an air of quiet seriousness. When she came closer he saw it was Elvira, daughter of Vittorio, the smith. Curious not to have known her at once, but she looked different.

'The Signore Inglese!'

She seemed greatly surprised to see who it was.

'Please go for help Elvira, that's a good girl, I seem to have had some kind of accident. I can't move, I'm afraid, and I don't quite remember how it happened.'

'Old Margherita has gone to tell them,' she spoke quietly in a detached way which was very strange to him. Why was she behaving like this, a child whose laughter was part of the music of his bay, whose tricks were the terror of the fishermen and the shopkeepers. She looked older, more poised and strikingly beautiful, sitting there quite unaware of him, on the ledge of the stone wall. He noticed that her eyes were a shade of olive. And were they perhaps, a little too bright, as though with tears. Elvira looks old enough and sad enough to be in love, he thought suddenly.

'Tell me, Elvira, how old are you?'

'Eighteen, Signore. But why do you ask?' she laughed.

'Old Margherita was frightened when she saw you. She tried to stop me from coming down to the beach. But I am always here at this time of day. You see, this is where I, where Paolo and I . . .' She seemed to become unaware of him again, lost in some dream of her own. The strangeness of it all puzzled him.

'Paolo?' he said, 'Where has the boy gone? He's been careless with the boat. Probably caused me this accident.'

Hearing the name she looked up and smiled delightedly.

'But he has gone away, Signore. He was called for. They told me the name of the place, but I have forgotten. I shall try to remember it for you.'

'Gone away, Elvira? What are you talking about. Paolo's always here. . . . Why, I told him yesterday . . . no, I don't quite remember yesterday. Never mind. He's probably searching for the boat. I expect the scoundrel's keeping out of my way.'

Looking up again, he saw she was staring at him, astonished.

'But Signore,' she said slowly. 'Paolo went away long ago, after the harvest. Paolo and I. . . .'

The girl was serious. But this was impossible to understand. She must be trying to draw him into some imaginative game of her own making.

'Here they are now, Signore. The police, Matucci, they're coming!'

'But why have you called for the police, Elvira?' he said. I only wanted someone to tell the Signore at the Villa that I am in trouble.'

'The Villa! I don't understand, Signore,' her voice trembled slightly. 'There is no one at the villa. When the Army came some of the officers lived there. But now. . . .

Three figures were approaching. Matucci, portly agent of police, in a broad black hat, came first, and behind him the Innkeeper's two younger sons, self-conscious in very new uniforms, pulling a small donkey harnessed to a cart. They approached warily. Recognising him they halted, gaping in amazement. What on earth was the matter with these peasants He was weak and began to grow impatient.

'Good morning, Matucci,' he said, Be so kind as to carry me to the Villa now you are here. I am sorry to give you this trouble.'

The little police officer seemed to take some time to recover from his surprise. He was greatly disturbed, mopping his brow nervously, removing and replacing his hat.

'The Signore Inglese is joking with us,' he said at last, 'The Signore is very brave. It is so remarkable to find one we know so well, in this manner, so unfortunate as to be our, our prisoner. We are so unhappy that our next meeting should occur like this. Dino! Tomasso! Help the Signore Carry him carefully to the guard at the new barracks.'

The young man who had borne himself on the sea allowed the young Fascisti guards to lift him into the cart. He was angry with these people, tired of trying to understand their astonishment. But he was too helpless to oppose them.

The girl with olive coloured eyes walked beside them. They began their dusty climb up the sunbaked hill.

'Signore!' she said.

'Yes, Elvira,' he opened his eyes and saw the angry blue sky through yellow sprays of mimosa, passing overhead.

'It was to a place called Bardia, Signore. My Paolo has gone to Bardia.'

And so, flowing suddenly back into this instant of past time and space, present things took shape again in his mind, Spring 1942 and a blue sea coming up too quickly, yes, far too quickly, to meet a plane turning and turning in its fall—and a spray of wild olive caught in the sunlight.

MORNING

Now curls of mist sway in the water-meadow
this cool morning, coming before summer heat
of sun, and curds crowd on the plangent chord
of the canal, or on the sloping, scarred
garth of hill slip, slide, supple, dissolving,
mouth's steamy breath, earth's shawl, night's remnant shadow

Each neb of bush holds daedal webs of light
spun like glass in threads, bridging, brittle span,
from leaf to leaf ; and spider mesh is strung
all round with water-jewels ; even the strong,
the tall trees bend, list under burden of
fine woof and warp, the thin chill stuff of night.

Through this the throb of engines thrills the brain
from sleep, as, in all-grey, wings lit the air
from Europe, from fire-spouting, under-sliding fields,
and in the sheet of mist, the dangerous folds
of vapour, eyes look for land, smooth-levelled lawn,
for rest of firm, familiar green and brown.

And when the sun with violent eye clears all
the cold away, the webs and fogs of dark
that shutter off this island to its dream,
along the margin of the aerodrome
black bombers stand, silent pitiful birds
that lately raged over and split the fearful skull.

SEAN JENNETT.

BLIMP RESURGENT

JOHN EDWARD

HEAVEN preserve us ! Shall we never see the end of Blimp ? For a year or two the world seemed almost rosy, and a festive wreath seemed appropriate to celebrate the veteran colonel's imminent demise. Now I no longer sing in my bath. It is worse than I thought. Pink and corpulent ; ever more pink and possibly more corpulent ; a new Blimp is upon us—Comrade Blimp. Or is it Commissar ?

This, however, is a serious article ; very serious. There is little in the present political scene that is more serious than the return of Blimp and the appearance of the modern heresy of '*We Democrats*.' There seems to be in certain circles an idea that of its nature democracy entails a particular social system. It is certainly true that although essentially a political, and not a social concept, it entails some form of social system, since that is necessary to any form of lasting government, and particularly necessary to a country so socially misgoverned as our own. It does not, however, as the less intelligent Left assume, who talk so airily of '*We Democrats*,' mean that we must necessarily embrace their own particular brand of fallacy.

It is at this point that Comrade Blimp roars 'Fascist,' much in the same voice as his predecessor yelled 'Bolshie.' Being true to type, he naturally assumes—assumption is his forte—that all who do not wear THE OLD RED TIE are to be divided into two separate classes. They may be morons, incapable of any action whatsoever. If not, then they are morons plotting frantically for a Conservative Paradise in which the constitutional liberties of the individual and bad sanitation are assured to all. In any case, morons.

Unfortunately, this assumption is not merely aggravating to a few Englishmen. It is highly dangerous abroad at a time when we are in much need of help, and when that help is not by any means to be found solely within the more 'advanced' political parties. It is fact, not party politics, that in the Low Countries, to name a single well authenticated instance, the solid bastions in the fight against the Nazis are the Right Wing groups, and that collaboration largely finds supporters in the Left. Moreover, the infamous Major himself is a Socialist. The unconsidered application of the term 'Fascist,' after the manner of the *Tribune*, to Right Wing elements in general is likely to alienate considerable support; an alienation that will not become until it comes to the most delicate and arduous task of trying to win the peace.

The tendency to regard the Left as composed of unmitigated rascals is fortunately largely on the wane, but that does not mean that many of their doctrines are not still, to say the least, mistaken. In consequence, the thunders that subdued the fiery spirit of the Colonel, or at least reduced it to a flicker, must now be turned upon his successor, in an attempt to stop a general scramble towards the opposite extreme. Not only has the new Blimp made the definite mistake of equating, owing to a surface similarity, the Portugal of Salazar with the Italy of Mussolini, but he is continually making other hasty judgments which cannot be verified and may lead to infinite trouble. The gutter press, and certain South American statesmen, have proved only too eager to write off General Franco as a Fascist. One of the latter, evidently overcome for the moment by the instincts of his forefathers, and the tendencies of his contemporaries, even suggested that Britain should invade Spain with a counter-revolution as a major object. Franco may indeed have become a Fascist. Then again, he may not. The point was, and still is, that it is little short of madness to ensure, if possible, that he becomes one at the earliest opportunity by hurling opprobrious epithets on the off-chance that he may deserve them.

It is with regard to France, however, that the activities of our Blimpish press may prove most fatal. The political in pre-war days was in itself a thing of menace. The super-imposition of the Vichy troubles and the consequent free bandying of 'traitor' may well lead, if great care is not taken, not to final unity, but to a recrudescence of the 'vice of the Gauls,' at a time when the effect on Europe would be nothing less than tragic.

'*L'affaire Darlan*' with its over-dramatic and highly ambiguous finale was in no way a pleasant business. It has, however, raised a most

important issue, and one which the press has for the most part happily ignored. In 1941 Mr Churchill seemingly somewhat startled by the sudden appearance of the Russian Bear in the home circus felt constrained to announce that, 'Any man or state that fights against Nazidom will have our aid. . . . That is our policy and that is our declaration.' The press did not complain. When a less imposing convert in the shape of Admiral Darlan crossed the line, the only question in the mind of Comrade Blimp was whether to have him shot or hanged, and the less delay the better. Pour encourager les autres ?

Tact next to taste is perhaps what of many things is most lacking in the modern journalist, but may to wield a Partingtonian mop. It is essential in most cases that one should not trust fully a convert of a Darlan hue, possibly that one should think of hanging him when he becomes no longer useful. In *every* case it is sheer madness to announce it in the press. It does not help recruitment. Besides when we have won the war it will be time enough to decide with whose services we can dispense. At present we need all the help that is forthcoming, no matter what the portents for the future. It is time in fact that the small sober portion of the British public rose and firmly murmured that historic phrase :—

'But I'm not so think as you pink I am.'

It is only by such determined action that having avoided the strictly constitutional penury admired by wealthy Tories we may escape also the misery of passing our remaining days in the glorified public conveniences of the GREAT RED DAWN. It has taken us some hundreds of years to realize that *laissez-faire* could not be swallowed whole, and it is only to be hoped that it will not require another hundred to discover that Socialism is not wholly edible, but that both are partly good and partly poisonous.

Moreover, it is not until the essentially pagan genus Blimp with its attendant irrationality and doctrinaire manner has been banished that there will be a possibility, let alone a likelihood of lasting peace. The only trouble is that the Socialist peers and journalists seem to be quite immune from the more lethal effects of the wars which they prolong.

We shall have to fight them when the war is over.

We still have a few copies of our last four numbers. These may be obtained from the Editorial Office, 13 Newton Court, Kensington, W. 8, at 1/- each plus postage. They will be sent on receipt of a postal order covering the cost.

THE MYSTERY

I'll break my chains and seek alone
The terraces of long-dead time,
And see alive the whitened bone,
And hear the lovely fall of rime,
And touch the yellow hair of queens,
And shudder in the magic grove,
And ask the saints and paladins
The mystery of hate and love.

And if the past for all its lore
And sanctity is ignorant,
I'll stand upon the utmost shore
And call to the omniscient,
The grave and courteous stars, to speak
Of how the mystery is made.
And when I know, my heart will shake
Fall cold, and I will be afraid.

JOSEPH GERARD O'CONOR

THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

PAUL FOSTER

THE century whose opening was adorned by the Brandenburg Concertos and which was ushered out by the magnificent clamour of Beethoven has exercised a continual fascination upon the imagination of the cultured world. The man who did not exist in the eighteenth century, said Talleyrand, had never known what it was to live. And many another has felt a nostalgia for the age of Walpole and Dr Johnson, the Marquise de Pompadour and Fanny Burney, Frederick the Great and Maria Theresa.

Those beautiful patterns of sound with which John Sebastian Bach honoured the Elector of Brandenburg have all the attraction which is felt to be typical of the century—the attraction of those little polished worlds of the German princelings—the miniature Versailles,

the evening serenades to the sound of violins and harpsichords, the candlelight on the formal terraces. An exquisite, harmonious and cultured society, it would appear to us a world all of one piece within itself, a glitter of beautiful women, of witty and accomplished men. A setting too, worthy of them, the powdered whigs, the diamond buckles, the swords gleaming beneath long satin coats. It seems a world of shining mirrors, parquet floors, elegant furniture, glass, silver, stately houses and gardens, an apparatus for living perfectly designed for a small and highly privileged society. Nobody really wants to return to the eighteen century of Hogarth and Rowlandson, it is certain : but everyone can feel the attraction of Fragonard, Boucher and Watteau.

For—the observation is trite—the age was a fearful contradiction. Not only were the redundant Versailles of Europe wrung from an impoverished and over-taxed peasantry : not only did the cosmetics conceal hidden blemishes and pockmarks : not only did the tides of filth wash about the most magnificent doors : but the whole age was one where social mal-adjustments, growing in violence since the end of the Middle Ages, crested, curved over and broke into a blood-red surf of Revolution. Europe of the Middle Ages had created, in face of fearful and continuous perils, an organization which would ensure the continuity of her culture. The King and his barons—they were the necessary breakwaters upon which the waves of Vandals, Danes, Huns, Tartars, Turks and Saracens had dashed in vain. But the waters of Europe were calmer now. The privileges which had induced King and baron to encounter dreadful perils were no longer relevant to a state of society where the only heathen menace was that of the Turk, who, in the closing years of the previous century, had assailed Vienna for the last time and in the opening years of the next was already the sick man of Europe. Perhaps it is fanciful to descry in the glittering aristocratic world of the eighteenth century the reaction of a nobility whose final feudal function had disappeared a nobility enjoying in its last golden fling the ease which comes upon perils past, a gala night before the dark subdued forces, so long excluded from privilege and power, demanded the guerdon of their long servitude.

Those who concentrate upon either side of the picture, however, are missing the point, are failing to observe the real human lesson of the eighteenth century, which does not lie in a facile contrast between Hogarth and Watteau. It lies in this : that the eighteenth century stated with perfect clarity the great problem of human society—how to combine change with continuity in political institutions—and stated this problem in two perfect examples, the two great states of the western world, England and France. The hang-over from feudal ideas was almost equal in both countries for the privileges of King and nobles were very great in England, as they were in France. A Duke of Newcastle exercised enormous and corrupting power for nearly fifty years : George III secured the departure of William Pitt

from office in 1801 (as he had secured that of his father in 1761), some dozen years after the dismissal of Necker by Louis XVI. There were terrible abuses of justice in England and Scotland rivalling the *Lettres de Cachet* and the condemnation of Calas: but the England of Victoria was continuous with the England of Dr Johnson and that, in its turn, with the England of Nell Gwynne: while in France the Revolution dug between past and future, between aristocrat and peasant, between believer and unbeliever, 'a red gulf of blood which could never be filled up.'

The world grows up extremely slowly but it does grow up. The lessons so vividly displayed in the two countries have not been altogether lost upon the statesmen of to-day. For, indeed, the moral can scarcely be missed. We have in France what can almost be called a 'laboratory revolution'—a revolution carried out in almost perfect circumstances so that human nature could be observed in the revolutionary process and its behaviour noted down as a norm for all future upheavals. Given an ancient and inefficient polity entirely dependent upon inherited privilege and prescription, whose power was concentrated on one gorgeous personage, the King; and given, in face of this, an intellectual movement whose whole theme was the perfection of human reason and human nature when untrammelled by prescriptive checks; the perfect antithesis, the archetypal ingredients for an explosion, were present. Between 1643 and 1792 the French throne was occupied by only three monarchs, two of whose reigns were enormously long; the first Louis XIV, had been able and industrious: the second, Louis XV, able and slothful: the third conscientious but immensely dull-witted. During the whole century, on the other hand, the *philosophers* had been criticizing the religious and political structure of their society in the most fundamental and adverse way possible. The vast genius of Voltaire had put in heaven the deity of a sceptical reason: the sentiment of Rousseau had enlisted to its aid the profound enthusiasms of the heart. The human heart and the human head, these were the altar and the throne of a new and beautiful age of humanity, which, once the Capetian Monarchy and the Catholic Church had been swept away, would burgeon into the full and fore-ordained perfection of the Golden Age—humanity naked and reasonable, generous, equal, fraternal and free. The millennium would come; the lion and the lamb would lie down together; Government would cease, for all men would be good.

No such acute contrast had previously faced political society. The Revolution was the counterpart of the Reformation, in its Genevan, not in its Anglican form. Two completely opposed political worlds were arrayed against one another, the world of Marie Antoinette and the world of Robespierre. No one could foresee what would happen, for nothing like it had happened before. Just as the claims of private judgment had never so fundamentally challenged hieratical authority as they did in the Reformation; so, in the Revolution, for the first time, the theory that man did not by nature need a governor, confronted

the encrusted rights of the French monarchy. No one could, from the treasures of experience, foresee the excesses of Brownists, levellers, and fifth-monarchy men in the realm of religion : no one could foresee that humanity politically ' free from its chains,' would slide into the blood-lust of the Terror, the licentiousness of the Directory, the despotism of Napoleon. But these things happened. The laboratory experiment was carried out to perfection and the results are available for our information : we shall always ignore that dossier at our peril.

Over against the archaic and revolutionary politics of France stood King, Lords and Commons of England. Exactly 150 years after the meeting of the States-General in 1789 King, Lords and Commons, none of whom looked too secure in 1789, confronted a new and gigantic revolutionary movement in Europe in a mood of sublime and exaggerated confidence. None of the three institutions, it is true, was the same as its eighteenth century counterpart, but none was *formally* different. During a period in which France went through the Assemblies, the Convention, the Directorate, the Consulate and the Second Empire, followed by the hundred governments of the third Republic and the final dissolution into her present institutionless chaos, the polity of England preserved its traditional appearances, though behind them the doctrines of the Revolution worked with energy and, after costly and costive delays, with success. He would be a bold man who asserted to-day that France had inherited from her Revolution more freedom, or more vigour, or more material progress, than England of to-day from the England of William Pitt, Wellington and George III.

This is the other side of the picture, then, and it is equally clear. The rational Revolution over against the traditional polity : the state which witnessed a continuous succession of *régimes* and *coups d'etats*, collapsing in 1940, and the state which stood in 1940 : the house built upon sand : the house built upon a rock. The house built upon sand ? What sand ? The theory that human nature, human reason, is a perfect instrument and that man's intellectual capacities unmoulded by tradition, unconstrained by Faith, unfiltered in expression, can attain the perfect polity. The rock ? A very odd-looking rock, no doubt, Kings, Lords and Commons, and was not Revolutionary France merely acting upon an acceptance of ' rational animal ' as the definition of man ?

> Reason hath moons, but other moons
> Lie mirrored in her sea,
> Confounding her astronomers,
> But oh ! delighting me !

The fallen reason of man has a bias : but there are, in Divine Providence, ' other moons ' which regulate its tides to a less violent motion. ' Rational animal ' is an adequate definition of man, no doubt, but within the terms of that definition we must conclude that there are implicit the terms ' man is an animal who is better for a King : man is an animal who is lost without a High Priest : man is by nature hierarchical.' The eighteenth century was one into which a throne and

altar were projected with certain associations derived from an obsolete stage of culture: at the end of the century, because of those associations, a violent rationalism assailed and destroyed throne and altar. But what emerged from that blood bath was a permanently unstable polity while another realm, which destroyed neither its throne nor its communion-table, persisted in an organic development which has secured a vast Empire held together by strong and spontaneous ties. The voice of Burke must be adjudged to have prevailed against the voice of Rousseau, for all his limitations. 'He pitied the plumage,' said Paine, 'and forgot the dying bird.' But no bird can live without its plumage, no man can be happy divorced from his traditions. The human heart and the human head are not an adequate substitute for throne and altar: and the lesson of the eighteenth century is that, though a nation must develop if it is not to perish, yet it will perish if it does not grow upon its ancient roots. The Age of Reason produced a laboratory experiment in which human nature was to prove that it was less *reasonable* to proclaim a doctrine of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity than to adhere to a structure of King, Lords and Commons.

TEMPEST

It is hoped very shortly to publish a new series of collected writing dedicated solely to imaginative prose and, more especially, to the fantasy and to the creative essay as a form of art.

Contribution will be welcomed from all writers and should not exceed 3000 words in length.

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